New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 11 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of April 11, 1949

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

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"South Pacific"

The New York Times

APRIL 8, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

No one will be surprised this morning to read that Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein 2d and Joshua Logan have written a magnificent musical drama. Even before they set pencil to paper and chose "South Pacific" for the title, alert theatre-goers very sensibly started to buy tickets for it. With Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza in the leading parts, the opening performance at the Majestic last evening amply confirmed preliminary expectations and brought the town a wonderfully talented show.

Although Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein are extraordinarily gifted men, they have not forgotten how to apply the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair. One thing that makes "South Pacific" so rhapsodically enjoyable is the hard work and organization that have gone into it under Mr. Logan's spontaneous direction. They have culled the story from James Michener's "Tales of the South Pacific," which in some incredible fashion managed to retain sensitive perceptions toward the Pacific Islands and human beings in the midst of the callous misery, boredom and slaughter of war.

* * *

The perception has been preserved in this sombre romance about a French planter and an American nurse from Arkansas. Writing for Broadway, Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein have not forgotten to entertain the customers with some exuberant antics by humorously sullen American Seabees who resent everything they have to endure. But essentially this is a tenderly beautiful idyll of genuine people inexplicably tossed together in a strange corner of the world; and the music, the lyrics, the singing and the acting contribute to this mood.

If the country still has the taste to appreciate a masterly love song, "Some Enchanted Evening" ought to become reasonably immortal. For Mr. Rodgers' music is a romantic incantation; and, as usual, Mr. Hammerstein's verses are both fervent and simple. Mr. Pinza's bass voice is the most beautiful that has been heard on a Broadway stage for an eon or two. He sings this song with infinite delicacy of feeling and loveliness of tone. As a matter of fact, Mr. Pinza is also a fine actor; and his first appearance on the one and only legitimate stage is an occasion worth celebrating.

* * *

Since we have all been more or less in love with Miss Martin for several years, it is no surprise to find her full of quicksilver, pertness and delight as the Navy nurse. She sings some good knockabout melodies with skill and good nature, making something particularly enjoyable out of the stomping jubilee of "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair" and blowing out the walls of the theatre with the rapture of "I'm In Love With a Wonderful Guy." In the opinion of one inquiring theatregoer, there seems to be a little of Annie Oakley, the gun-girl, left in Miss Martin's attack on a song, and perhaps this should be exorcised by slow degrees. For the Navy nurse is a few cuts above Annie socially. Miss Martin is the girl who can make her captivating without deluging her in charm.

Since "South Pacific" is not an assembled show, but a thoroughly composed musical drama, you will find high standards of characterization and acting throughout. Take Juanita Hall, for example. She plays a brassy, greedy, ugly Tonkonese woman with harsh, vigorous, authentic accuracy; and she sings one of Mr. Rodgers' finest songs, "Bali Ha'i" with rousing artistry.

'SOUTH PACIFIC'

Musical play with book by Oscar Hammerstein 2d and Joshua Logan; adapted from James A. Michener's "Tales of the South Pacific"; music by Richard Rodgers; lyrics by Mr. Hammerstein; book and musical numbers staged by Mr. Logan; scenery by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Motley; orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett; presented by Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein, in association with Leland Hayward and Mr. Logan at the Majestic Theatre, April 7, 1949. The cast:

Ngana.....Barbara Luna
Jerome.....Michael Deleon
Henry.....Richard Silvera
Ensign Nellie Forbush.....Mary Martin
Emile de Becque....Ezio Pinza
Bloody Mary.....Juanita Hall
Bloody Mary's Assistant.....Musa Williams
Abner.....Archie Savage
Stewpot.....Henry Slate
Luther Billis..Myron McCormick
Professor.....Fred Sadoff
Lt. Joseph Cable, U.S.M.C....William Tabbert
Capt. George Brackett, U.S.N.....Martin Wolfson
Cmdr. Wm. Harbison, U.S.N..Harvey Stephens
Yeoman Herbert Quale.....Alan Gilbert
Sgt. Kenneth Johnson.....Thomas Gleason
Seabee Richard West.....Dickinson Eastham
Seabee Morton Wise.....Henry Michel
Seaman Tom O'Brien..Bill Dwyer
Radio Operator Bob McCaffrey..Biff McGuire
Marine Cpl. Hamilton Steeves..Jim Hawthorne
Staff Sgt. Thomas Hassinger...Jack Fontan
Seaman James Hayes.....Beau Tilden
Lt. Genevieve Marshall.....Jacqueline Fisher
Ensign Dinah Murphy.....Roslyn Lowe
Ensign Janet MacGregor.....Sandra Deel
Ensign Cora Macrae.....Bernice Saunders
Ensign Sue Yaeger..Pat Northrop
Ensign Lisa Minelli..Gloria Meli
Ensign Connie Walewska.....Mardi Bayne
Ensign Pamela Whitmore....Evelyn Colby
Ensign Bessie Noonan.....Helena Schurgot
Liat.....Betta St. John
Marcel.....Richard Loo
Lt. Buzz Adams....Don Fellows

After wasting his talents on stereotyped parts for several years, Myron McCormick has a good one as a braggart, scheming Seabee, and plays it with great comic gusto. "South Pacific" naturally does well by the ruffians who saved democracy amid groans of despair in the Eastern ocean, and "There Is Nothing Like a Dame" ought to go down as their theme song.

As evidence of the care that has gone into this drama take note of the part of Capt. George Brackett, U. S. N. The part is written with real invention on the model of a human being, and Martin Wolfson plays him admirably.

Jo Mielziner has provided entrancing settings that presumably have a Polynesian accent. Russell Bennett has written orchestrations, especially for the overtures, that are rich and colorful in instrumental sound. For the authors and producers have a high regard for professional skill, and everything they have put their hands to is perfectly wrought. Fortunately, Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein are also the most gifted men in the business. And "South Pacific" is as lively, warm, fresh and beautiful as we had all hoped that it would be.

Journal and American

APRIL 8, 1949

Fine Music, Smooth Lyrics, Prize Story

By ROBERT GARLAND

Now that it's at the Majestic, this "South Pacific" has pretty nearly everything. This "pretty nearly everything" is always good, often better, frequently best.

For music, Richard Rodgers' fine and seldom highfalutin score. For lyrics, Oscar Hammerstein's smooth and tops-when-earthy verses. For story, James Michener a prize-worthy Polynesian war-tales adapted by Mr. Hammerstein and Joshua Logan.

To such pre-production assets add some South Pacific scenery in Jo Mielziner's play-with-music manner, some scanty and scantier garments by the costumers known as Motley, some Rodgersian orchestrations by Russell Bennett and an orchestra that is an orchestra under the leadership of Salvatore Dell'Isola.

And a cast! A cast in which Mary Martin, who belongs to Broadway, and Ezio Pinza, borrowed from the Metropolitan Opera House, are rightly starred; in which Juanita Hall, Betta St. John, William Tabbert, Martin Wolfson, Harvey Stephens and Myron McCormick are rightly featured. And Mr. McCormick's activated abdominal tattooing, which should be.

These make for good into better into best entertainment. The American theatre has a reputation for the worthiness of its "musicals." This "South Pacific" will, in its long run, enhance it. It has, already!

* * *

Man Meets Girl

Supposing that it mattered, I'm in no position to report on the faithfulness with which "South Pacific," as a musical, follows "Tales of the South Pacific," as a book. But Ensign Nellie Forbush is at the Majestic. So is Planter Emile de Becque. M. de Becque's Polynesian prodigy are also seen and heard, although they number only two.

Man meets Girl before the first curtain rises and while the overture is on. Man loses Girl on the edge of the mid-show intermission. But when, one act and seven songs later, the final curtain falls, Man has his Girl again as He and She, and his unhallowed South Pacific offspring, are having tea together as one big legal family.

Then, concurrently with the happy Nellie Forbush-Emile de Becque story, there is the unhappy story of Liat, Bloody Mary's daughter, and Lt. Joseph Cable, U.S.M.C. In and out is the brash

and busy Luther Billis, the all-too-able seaman who can make, among other desirabilities, a grass skirt, a well-ironed pleat and a female impersonation.

Backgrounding both the happy and unhappy stories are the U. S. sailors, Seabees and Marines, the native islanders and a bevy of lady ensigns evidently not included when the boys in uniform get together and tell the Polynesian world that "There's Nothing Like a Dame"—young American womanhood excepted!

• • •

Mary Martin, of Broadway north of 42d Street, and Ezio Pinza, of Broadway south of 42d Street, work affectionately together. If she sings up in honor of Mr. Pinza and he sings down in honor of Miss Martin, the result is more than everything it should be. Duet or solo, the Ensign and the Planter are alive, believable and zestful.

• • •

Cast Is Excellent

And there can be only enthusiasm for the lesser members of the cast assembled by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein as producers, in association with Leland Hayward and Joshua Logan, for Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein as coneoctors, in association with Joshua Logan and James Michener, of Broadway's new musical must-see.

High among the supporters of Miss Martin and Mr. Pinza are Juanita Hall, whose Bloody Mary is flawless, Betta St. John, whose Liat is beautiful, and Myron McCormick, whose Luther Billis is too, true to be good up to the evening's very end. As Lt. Joseph Cable, U.S.M.C., William Tabbert is a singing-actor to acknowledge.

But it's the Richard Rodgers songs you'll be hearing the most of in "South Pacific's" long run. They are made to order for Mary, the Martin, and Ezio, the Pinza to sing, and Bill, the barfly, to wear out in his jukebox . . .

Yes, this "South Pacific" has pretty nearly everything for pretty nearly everybody. It was a big hit before it got to the Majestic. It is a bigger hit now that it has moved in and taken over.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

APRIL 8, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Pearls, Pure Pearls

THE new and much-heraided musical, "South Pacific," is a show of rare enchantment. It is novel in texture and treatment, rich in dramatic substance, and eloquent in song. Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza are the chief sorcerers in the adaptation of James A. Michener's "Tales of the South Pacific" at the Majestic. They have superlative collaboration from a large and inspired company. Since Oscar Hammerstein, 2d and Joshua Logan have afforded them a book of variety and color, in which the Richard Rodgers-Hammerstein numbers are beautifully integrated, last night's gala premiere was an occasion for rejoicing. All the pleasant things that have been said in advance about "South Pacific" have been triumphantly justified.

• • •

Perhaps the chief delight of the production is the manner in which it belies its intricacy. The librettists have plucked various situations from the Michener novel, mixing the grim background of island fighting with two inter-locking romances and making capital of lusty humor and the inevitable tragedy of war. Under Logan's superb direction, the action shifts with constant fluency. Borrowing the lap dissolve from the screen, he has kept the book cumulatively arresting and tremendously satisfying. The occasional dances appear to be magical improvisations. It is a long and prodigal entertainment, but it seems all too short. The Rodgers music is not his finest, but it fits the mood and pace of "South Pacific" so felicitously that one does not miss a series of hit tunes. In the same way the lyrics are part and parcel of a captivating musical unity.

The scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner are not the least virtues of the exhibit. He has conjured up two island settings with a minimum of ornamental nonsense, using screens and a briefly blackened stage to back up a chiaroscuro of a naval base and the neighboring Bali H'ai, which is celebrated in one of the loveliest of the Rodgers-Hammerstein songs. Whether opera's gift to the theater, Pinza and the fettlesome Miss Martin are falling in love and being separated by the fact that the French planter has had a Polynesian wife, or Myron McCormick, William Tabbert, Juanita Hall, Betta St. John and the others are reconstructing existence on a spear point of our attack on Japan, the show is eye-filling as well as dramatic.

• • •

Pinza's commanding bass voice swells magnificently in "This Nearly Was Mine" and "Some Enchanted Evening," but he matches it with singularly satisfactory acting. Miss Martin has never been more appealing and gay. Her portrayal of a Navy nurse is magnificent. In "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair," in which she suits words to action, or "I'm in Love With a Wonderful Guy," in which she steps like sixty, she makes the romance far more than a musical comedy love affair. What is more, she sings with Pinza and holds her own. McCormick jests and does a wonderful danse de ventre; Miss St. John is gravely graceful as a Tonkinese miss, and Tabbert is fine as the lieutenant to whom she surrenders. Moreover, Miss Hall gives a rowdy characterization of Liat's scrounging mother, while Martin Wolfson and Harvey Stephens play big brass with arrogance and persuasion. The Motley costumes are right and exquisite. "South Pacific" is a musical play to be cherished.

Daily Mirror

APRIL 8, 1949

'South Pacific' a Solid Hit, With Great Cast, Score

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Those fabulous reports you've been hearing from the road about "South Pacific" were verified when the new Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein musical reached the Majestic last night. Almost completely different from "Oklahoma," it is another smash hit for the brilliant writer-manager team and their co-producers, Leland Hayward and Joshua Logan.

Programmed as a musical play, "South Pacific" is just that. It boasts no ballets and no hot hoofing. It has no chorus in the conventional sense. Every one in it plays a part. It is likely to establish a new trend in musicals.

Rodgers and Hammerstein have fashioned a score to rival the one they did for "Oklahoma." There isn't a bit of filler in it. Every number is so outstanding that it is difficult to decide which will be the most popular. However, we'll place bets on "Some Enchanted Evening," "There's Nothing Like a Dame," "Bali Ha'i," "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," and "I'm in Love With a Wonderful Guy" to be heading the Hit Parade list.

Hammerstein, with an assist from Joshua Logan, penned the book after James A. Michener's Pulitzer Prize winning tome, "Tales of the South Pacific." It has to do with a romance between a pretty young Navy nurse and a gallant middle-aged French planter, who renders an invaluable service to our armed forces in beating the Japs. In Michener's original, the heroic Frenchman was killed, but Hammerstein and Logan bring him back from his dangerous mission for a happy ending. And that's okay by us.

The cast is terrific. Thumb the pages of your dictionary, pick out the brightest superlatives you can find and they'll fit the performances of Mary Martin as the nurse and Ezio Pinza as the French planter. They are truly magnificent.

There is a wonderfully hilarious contribution by Myron McCormick as an enterprising Seabee, with a flair for turning an easy buck and getting out of trouble. Juanita Hall is excellent as a native entrepreneur and William Tabbert merits a snappy salute as a serious and brave young Marine. Others due citations are Martin Wolfson, Harvey Stephens, Betta St. John, Henry Slate and Fred Sadoff.

"South Pacific" not only plows new technical paths, but is making history at the box-office as well. By the time you read this, there will be an advance sale of approximately a half million dollars. Which proves that the public recognizes a good buy. A smart first-night audience rocked the Majestic rafters with robust applause for a truly great musical. They found, and we think you will find, "South Pacific" a beguiling, heart-warming, amusing and rewarding spot to spend an evening.

The Sun

APRIL 8, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

'South Pacific' Is Stunning.

Some of the showmen of our frenzied metropolis who like the theater and are among those who do the most for it in New York and throughout America have put their talents together in creating a stunning new musical show—"South Pacific," a big and tumultuous affair, which began to play last evening at the Majestic.

"South Pacific" combines superb music and lyrics with first-rate book material, fine performances with skillful showmanship. It serves to bring fresh vitality to our soaring musical stage, and it finds Rodgers & Hammerstein functioning on the plane that they achieved in giving the theater such masterpieces as "Oklahoma" and "Carousel."

In considering the merits of this new "South Pacific," which was triumphant in its first performance, there are such vital factors as the scope and range of an unhindered Joshua Logan as the director; the frolicsome ways of an inspired Mary Martin as a wartime nurse; the heroic singing of a star from the Met, Ezio Pinza, and the capacity of Jo Mielziner for stage design and lighting. Put all of this with the contributions of Rodgers & Hammerstein and you have a show that is pretty wonderful.

Richard Rodgers has written some exhilarating song hits—"I'm in Love With a Wonderful Guy," "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," "Some Enchanted Evening" and "Honey Bun." Hammerstein's lyrics were never sharper and his homey words for little Nellie Forbush's plainness go right along with his American-scene lyrics for "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" and "The Surrey With the Fringe on the Top."

Ensign Nellie Forbush, Hammerstein lyrically insists, is as corny as Kansas in August, but Mary Martin, playing the role of the nurse from Little Rock, is completely captivating. She is festive and delightful in her lighthearted moments and is entirely believable in her serious ones. She gives the best performance of her career. Ezio Pinza, playing the Frenchman who has been an exile in the Far Pacific for many years, has enormous charm and facility; he asserts himself as a romantic actor, and he sings magnificently.

Rodgers & Hammerstein along with Joshua Logan and that canny showman, Leland Hayward, have assembled an excellent cast of co-players upon the stage of the Majestic. Myron McCormick, as Luther Billis, the conniver, the fixer, the finagler, the man of strategy, gives a grand performance, and he is tougher than almost any Princetonian you ever saw. The choice of Martin Wolfson, short, compact and wiry, for the part of the fiery Naval Captain, is a bit of ideal casting. William Tabbert does some fine singing as an ardent and heroic lieutenant. Juanita Hall plays Bloody Mary, Tonkinese woman, with great gusto. Harvey Stephens is regulation all the way as a Commander. Don Fellows is brisk and amusing as in his characterization of a combat flyer, and Betta St. John is an appealing Tonkinese maiden.

"South Pacific," based upon portions of James Mitchener's "Tales of the South Pacific," is a musical play without ballet or chorus, the dancing is of an incidental sort, and it's a show in which the rowdyism and barbarism of the Marines and the Seabees blend well enough with the romantic story of little Nellie from Little Rock and her adoring French planter.

Great men of the theater, Rodgers, Hammerstein and Logan. "South Pacific" is a thrilling and exultant musical play. Let Broadway enjoy it for a couple of years.

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 8, 1949

'South Pacific' Opens; Tuneful and Bright

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Having more than justified some of the most terrifyingly enthusiastic advance reports ever circulated, "South Pacific" soared exquisitely over the Majestic stage last night and made it quite clear that the theater is going to be blessedly enchanted for many months to come.

This is the ultimate modern blending of music and popular theater to date, with the finest kind of balance between story and song, and hilarity and heartbreak.

Mary Martin, whose star has been riding high for a number of shows, achieves a new heaven for herself here with an authoritative versatility nobody in the theater can equal. And Ezio Pinza, one of grand opera's greatest, proves that new surroundings like these only make one more natural home for a fine singing actor.

"South Pacific" tells a touching romance wherein two worlds meet. It is the kind of love story that the war made familiar, as an American nurse becomes captivated by a French planter on a little island where she is stationed. An unconsolable rift arises when she finds he has two half caste children, but when she experiences the possibility of what his death would mean to her, she sees that his love is the only thing of importance.

There is a parallel love story of a young naval lieutenant whose carefully nurtured prejudices prevent his marriage to a Tonkinese girl he adores.

The story is related with the most direct simplicity, while the activities of the naval station afford a delightful variety of surrounding events.

Every song in the score has something to say that immediately advances the story or the characters' relationships, and the orchestra on its own often makes the most telling comment on silent stage action. There is a scene at the end of the first act between the two stars where the cuing of music to dialogue, singing and dance is sheer perfection.

If you agreed that Miss Martin was good in her last couple of local appearances, accept the fact that they were in the nature of practice for this. Here she is what everyone likes to think the typical American girl is, innately intelligent if short on academic curiosity, straight shooting, hopestly emotional and generously good humored.

Not only does she sing ballads and rhythm numbers, and dance with deceptively untutored looking spontaneity, but she projects powerful emotions without substituting tricks for sincerity. Her first falling in love is a delicate submission to surprising emotions, and toward the end she can choke up your throat simply by saying, "Uh huh."

After Ezio Pinza's many magnificent portrayals at the Metropolitan, it is no great surprise that he should prove a past master at this sort of theater. Just to hear him sing the last phrase of "Some Enchanted Evening" is worth the admission, but beyond that he proves a realistic actor of simple intensity and the most agreeable relaxation.

The singer has never wanted for wide feminine admiration, and it is likely that there will be a whole new female public on his trail after this polished appealing performance.

There is an astonishingly authentic portrayal by Juanita Hall as the Tonkinese, Bloody Mary. In posture, aspect, manner and speech Miss Hall seems to belong utterly to this island world.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
APRIL 8, 1949

A Grand Musical Play Called 'South Pacific'

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

Few shows have been so handicapped by advance reports of their wonders as "South Pacific," which had its lavish opening at the Majestic Theatre last night. And few have lived up so handsomely to the out-of-town superlatives. For Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein 2nd and Joshua Logan have taken two stories and a number of characters from James A. Michener's memorable "Tales of the South Pacific" and weaved them into an utterly captivating work of theatrical art. I do not think it is first-night excess which causes me to hail it as one of the finest musical plays in the history of the American theatre.

It is not an easy thing to take a book dealing with the desolation of modern warfare, even when it takes place in the romantic isles of the Pacific, and turn it into a musical show without making it seem cheap and trivial. But the Messrs. Rodgers, Hammerstein and Logan have achieved the feat beautifully. "South Pacific" is not only delightful in its songs, humor and romantic narrative, but captures an enchanting mood of rueful, bittersweet sadness and even without forcing it, finds time for a sardonic glance at the tragedy of prejudice between people of different races.

Some Contributions

"South Pacific" is a work of great style and loveliness that is yet gay, vigorous and vital. It is both strangely touching and richly entertaining. All of its elements fit together with the rarest and most tasteful showmanship. Mr. Rodgers' music is haunting and beautiful, with half a dozen songs that are unforgettable. Mr. Hammerstein's lyrics are as distinguished as any he has ever written. The book mixes drama and comedy in highly skillful fashion. Joshua Logan's staging is imaginative, vigorous and never hackneyed. Jo Mielziner's sets achieve the perfect mood for the narrative. The acting is virtually inspirational.

For a long time everyone has known that Mary Martin was exceedingly expert and charming in the ways of musical comedy. But nothing I have ever seen her do had prepared me for the loveliness, humor, gift for joyous characterization and sheer lovableness of her portrayal of Nellie Forbush, the gay, high-spirited nurse from Little Rock, who is so shocked to find her early racial prejudices suddenly cropping up. Hers is a completely irresistible performance. As for Ezio Pinza, the eminent refugee from opera, he, of course, sings delightfully. But he is far more than a fine singer. As the planter De Becque, he emerges as an expert and charming actor, possessing rare romantic style.

Some Performers

As Luther Billis, the enterprising and irrepressible Seabee, Myron McCormick, who always gives a good performance, offers a comic characterization that is by far the best thing he has done in the theatre. I won't even try to describe the hilarity of an odd dance he does. Juanita Hall is splendid as the sharp-tongue Tonkinese called Bloody Mary, and Betta St. John is both lovely and moving as her tragic daughter. William Tabbert is just right as young Lieutenant Cable, who is frightened by his love for a native girl, and there is a gem of a characterization by Martin Wolfson as a testy Naval captain. Harvey Stephens does well what little he has to do as Lieut. Harbison.

As is already known, "South Pacific" is based chiefly on the two stories by Mr. Michener called "Our Heroine" and "Fo' Dolla'." The story of the Remittance Man, who operated behind the Japanese lines, has been allotted to De Becque and Lieut. Cable, and, while I missed the gallant Englishman, it is a wise change for the play's purposes. There are so many things to be said about "South Pacific" that I can here only note in passing that my favorite song is "Some Enchanted Evening," although I am very partial to "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Out of My Hair," "I'm In Love with a Wonderful Guy," "Younger Than Springtime" and "Happy Talk." Did I say that "South Pacific" is a joy?

DAILY NEWS
APRIL 8, 1949

'South Pacific' a Beautiful, Big Musical, and Pinza Dominates It

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The finest things about the new musical play, "South Pacific," are, in this order, the high ambition of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d in putting it together with words and music and then putting it on; the first Broadway appearance of Ezio Pinza, whose great talent as a singer, comedian and leading man has long been known to patrons of grand opera; the gallant spirit and music-show know-how of Mary Martin, and the tropical settings by Jo Mielziner.

Packs in a Lot.

Whoo-ee, but that was a long and weighty sentence! Well, so is the show. It was a great big hit long before it opened, and the enthusiasm of its first audience at the Majestic Theatre last evening indicates that it will continue to be one for a year or two or three. With this assurance assured, I hope everybody involved will forgive me for reporting here that "South Pacific" is a good and classy musical but not the greatest thing since the invention of the wheel or even since "Kiss Me, Kate."

The book is based on James A. Michener's salty and sentimental "Tales of the South Pacific." As it is presented on the stage, it is a remarkable venture trying to confine many moods and stories within the dimensions of a Broadway show. In order to pack in as much as possible, the authors have dispensed with set numbers and have tried to make everything all one piece. This is what Richard Wagner did in his musicals.

Mr. Hammerstein's impeccable lyrics have been fitted to some beguiling Rodgers melodies. The score gets off to a wonderful start with Mr. Pinza singing "Some Enchanted Evening" to Miss Martin in his luxuriant hilltop garden on a South Pacific island. The authority of a superb musician is at once apparent—and so is the authority of a big and handsome actor.

Dances With Her Fingers.

Miss Martin, wearing a feminine version of a crew haircut, scores on her own singing "I'm in Love With a Wonderful Guy" and by taking a real shampoo while warbling "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair." She also clowns, endearingly, in a scene in which the warriors and the warrioresses on Mr. Michener's island give a home-talent show.

There should be, at least one haunting melody in a musical about the tropics, and Mr. Rodgers has provided a lovely one in "Bali Ha'i," which is splendidly done by Juanita Hall. And the sweetest, fetchingest number of the evening is "Happy Talk," which Miss Hall sings while a graceful young beauty, Betta St. John, pantomimes it in a finger dance.

The story involves Miss Martin, a Navy nurse, and her romance with Mr. Pinza, a middle-aged French planter on an island which our forces have occupied in the war with Japan. It also involves as many Marine, Seabee and Navy characters as possible, and such Polynesians as Bloody Mary (Miss Hall) and her daughter (Miss St. John).

"South Pacific" has charm and melody and some good comedy by Myron McCormick in the role of an acquisitive sailor. It is beautiful, and expensively presented and is, as I say, a good show. It would help if you read Mr. Michener's book first.

"The Ivy Green"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
APRIL 6, 1949

= By HOWARD BARNES =

How Green Is the Ivy!

THERE is little in "The Ivy Green" to suggest the greatness of Charles Dickens. Mervyn Nelson's attenuated stage biography at the Lyceum jumps through thirty-four years of the novelist's private life. It is neither illuminating nor theatrically effective. The literary giant of the Victorian era emerges as a pompous exhibitionist, who succumbs to premature senility. His wife and consorts dominate this domestic expose, but even their cat-fights are far from exhilirating. Stewart Chaney's handsome reconstruction of Tavistock House and his colorful period costumes are the chief assets of a dull and trifling show. Even such adept players as Judith Evelyn, Hurd Hatfield and Ernest Cossart do not make an inside account of genius persuasive or palatable.

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The author has been chiefly concerned with the unfortunate marriage of Dickens to Catherine Hogarth. Although it coincided with the start of his work as a mature artist, there is scarcely a hint that the Scottish Kate had any influence over the development of her bonnie Boz. Instead of establishing him socially and giving him personal security, she is shown as a dim-wit, breeding too many children and driving him into the arms of her vicious sister and an impressionable young actress. Nelson may be right in his facts. He has not woven them into the texture of a gripping and perceptive drama. Miss Evelyn tries to help matters by giving a loud speaker commentary between the numerous scenes, but this device is as clumsy as the play itself.

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The title derives from the line in "Pickwick Papers" which runs: "A dainty plant is the ivy green, it creepeth o'er ruins old." Its application to the Hall Shelton production applies not only to the London house of Dickens, but to the novelist himself. Ruin in the midst of flaming creative effort appears to be the thesis of the work, but it never touches the hem of tragedy and rarely succeeds in achieving mere pathos. Miss Evelyn, to be sure, has a moving scene or two, as she loses her Boz to the scheming Georgina, or reclaims him at his death in 1870, but she has a dubious assignment. Only rarely is the true quality of Dickens reflected in her character, as was Browning's in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." Daniel O'Herlihy, a new-comer to Broadway from Ireland, does not aid her in his painfully explicit portrayal of the novelist.

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The actor is somewhat commanding in the early scenes, as he is torn between his cockney background and a love for popular acclaim and his enormous gift for recording the humorous and terrible aspects of living in a largely artificial age. He is less than convincing when dyeing his hair, taking up with a comely youngster, dismissing his most loyal friends and evidencing the dithering of dotage. Hatfield is far finer as his publisher, John Forster, while Cossart as his father and Oliver Cliff as Daniel Maclise are well up to their specific jobs. Neither they, nor Carmen Mathews, in the part of Georgina, have a play of any substance to make their acting consecutive and full-bodied. "The Ivy Green" does no credit to Dickens or the theater.

'THE IVY GREEN'

Play by Mervyn Nelson; staged by Roy Hargrave; scenery and costumes by Stewart Chaney; presented by Hall Shelton at the Lyceum Theatre, April 5, 1949. The cast:

Martin.....Barnard Hughes
Martha Tripham.....Ruth White
Baroness Burdette-Coutts...
Neva Patterson
Daniel Maclise.....Oliver Cliff
John Forster.....Hurd Hatfield
John Dickens.....Ernest Cossart
Mary Hogarth.....Joy Reese
Charles Dickens.....
Daniel O'Herlihy
Catherine Dickens..Judith Evelyn
Georgina Hogarth.....
Carmen Mathews
Maria Beadnell...Leta Bonynge
Harriet.....Mary Lou Taylor
Ellen Ternan.....June Dayton
Charles Dickens, Jr.....
Donald White

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in the drawing room of Tavistock House, London, over a period of years from 1836 to 1870. Act I, Scene 1, A night in spring; Scene 2, Dusk. One year later; Scene 3, An afternoon in summer. Four years later; Scene 4, Christmas Eve. Eight years later. Act II, Scene 1, An afternoon in summer. Ten years later; Scene 2, An evening in early summer. One year later; Scene 3, Sunset. Ten years later (June 16, 1870); Scene 4, 8 a. m. Two days later.

DAILY NEWS
APRIL 6, 1949

Boz Duz Everything Except Live In a Play About Charles Dickens

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If the last long minutes of "The Ivy Green" could live up to the enchanting first few minutes, we'd have a fine new play at the Lyceum Theatre. But Mervyn Nelson's period piece about Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens becomes laggard. Even though there is a most appealing performance of Mrs. Dickens by Judith Evelyn, the real star of last evening's premiere was Stewart Chaney, the creator of the setting and costumes.

Producer Hall Shelton has given Mr. Nelson's drama most of the chances of success that a sincerely written play deserves. Many of the company are good and the production as a whole is a conscientious striving for Nineteenth Century atmosphere. But when it is all finished Charles Dickens still remains a foolish bore—which he may well have been for all I know.

In the first few minutes "Boz" Dickens carries his young wife across the threshold of their new home, Tavistock House, in the London of 1836. Awaiting them here are various members of the Dickens and Hogarth families and such familiars as Phiz, the artist, and Fuz, the biographer. Thanks to the shy and tearful delight of Miss Evelyn at the first sight of her new home, and thanks to Mr. Chaney for having built it so splendidly with its candles and lovely staircase and fine furnishing, the opening of "The Ivy Green" promises an evening of great pleasure.

Dickens Doesn't Emerge.

But soon the drama becomes a chronology. Once a year Mrs. Dickens presents her adored husband with another child. Mr. Dickens is bored by these gifts and by his wife's soft, simple, Scottish ways. He becomes attached to one of her sisters, and when the girl dies another sister attaches herself to him. In 1870 he dies, scarcely a minute too soon.

There is much talk about Dickens having the right to be an odd duck because he belongs to the world and not to his wife, and in any moment of great emotion he slams into the library, shuts the door and writes "Oliver Twist" or something. Yet Mr. Nelson's drama fails to give me the impression that Dickens was a literary man, and Daniel O'Herlihy's playing of the character is far from profound. Mr. O'Herlihy is up against too difficult an assignment—to play Boz from young husbandhood to a crippled and dying old man.

Helpful Performances.

Hurd Hatfield does quite well in the role of Dickens' friend and biographer, Forester; Ernest Cossart is wasted in a couple of scenes as Charles' bibulous father; Carmen Mathews manages to put some bite into her role of the sister who muscles into Tavistock House, and there are attractive performances by Oliver Cliff, Neva Patterson, Ruth White and Joy Reese.

Alone among the players, Miss Evelyn really knows how to grow old and sad. She is indeed a bride when Mr. O'Herlihy carries her across the threshold, and she is indeed a cast-off but still ever-loving wife 44 years later when Boz dies and she arranges for his funeral in Westminster Abbey. Miss Evelyn is an actress of first quality, but she and Mr. Chaney together can't rescue "The Ivy Green."

The New York Times

APRIL 6, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

When Charles Dickens is at his worst, Mervyn Nelson's biographical play is at its best. That occurs toward the end of "The Ivy Green," which opened at the Lyceum last evening. When the egotist conquers the husband, when Dickens turns his wife out of their home and brings in a silly actress to replace her, "The Ivy Green" acquires some of the fire and tension of a play, and the actors reap the reward of some excellent characterizations.

All through this series of tableaus on the private life of a vain and turbulent writer, Judith Evelyn plays Mrs. Dickens with strength, pride and distinction. In the final scene both the character and the actress deserve and enjoy a few moments of triumph.

* * *

To tell the truth, Mr. Nelson has not given them much dramatic support. Lives of authors generally remind us that only their writing is sublime. Like Tolstoy, Dickens was a difficult man to live with and much less admirable than he seems to be in his work. There is no general agreement about the depth of his villainy toward his wife nor about the nature of the provocation.

But, according to Mr. Nelson, the Dickens household was full of cross-currents of malice—Georgina Hogarth, Mrs. Dickens' sister, trying to supplant her as mistress of the house; John Forster, biographer, trying to defeat Georgina's campaign for supremacy and to make Dickens live a respectable Victorian life. Although Dickens loved the poor and championed the downtrodden in his public life, Mr. Nelson represents him as selfish, pompous, cruel, silly and increasingly senile in his domestic life.

* * *

The form of "The Ivy Green" is about as untheatrical as possible. In eight scenes it covers thirty-four years. To supply the continuity, Miss Evelyn speaks connecting passages over the voice amplifier, which introduces an alien, mechanical element into the midst of the drama. Since Mr. Nelson's style is literal, Dickens' happy years are fairly cloying. There is nothing much more debilitating in the theatre than the sight of a great author romping joyously in the bosom of his family and then rushing pell-mell into the study to dash off a masterpiece.

But in the second act Mr. Nelson closes in on Dickens, springs the traps he has been setting in the first act and writes to the point with a kind of pitiless economy. Dickens is not merely a cad in these scenes: he is an ass. As far as Mr. Nelson's sympathies are concerned, "The Ivy Green" is Mrs. Dickens' play, and Miss Evelyn dominates it with quiet but vengeful imperiousness when she leaves Tavistock House under orders from her husband, and when she returns to it with the authority of a widow after his death.

Under Roy Hargrave's direction, "The Ivy Green" has been handsomely produced with a grandly designed setting of a drawing room and period costumes by Stewart Chaney. As Dickens, Daniel O'Herlihy gives a satisfactory portrait of insufferable vanity and temperamental ruthlessness. After a first act of intolerable coyness, Carmen Mathews settles down to a grimly powerful performance as Georgina. Hurd Hatfield plays a dour, puritanical and inflexible John Forster with no visible semblance of humanity.

* * *

There is some excellent acting in the minor roles—particularly by that incomparable comedian, Ernest Cossart, as Dickens' father and by the lovely Neva Patterson as Baroness Angela Burdette-Coutts. June Dayton plays the complaisant young actress pleasantly. Oliver Cliff plays the artist, Daniel Maclise, with rather too much suavity for comfort. As the family servant, Ruth White is excellent, substituting real character for the usual character acting in such parts.

When Dickens goes off the deep end in the last scenes, this studious play about him comes quickly to life. But the good moments in it come in spite of Mr. Nelson's literal, episodic method. "The Ivy Green is a worthy piece of work without being a continuously stimulating drama.

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 6, 1949

'Ivy Green' Opens; Tells Dickens Life

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Despite several undeniably moving moments, for which Judith Evelyn is responsible, "The Ivy Green" suffers from a fault common to nearly all plays which study artistic genius.

Unless the actor can at least stimulate on stage the practice for which the subject character is renowned, it is unlikely that anyone in the audience is going to believe for one moment that he is really as good as all the other characters say.

In this case the central figure is Charles Dickens, and the mere mention of his name ought to prove he can write.

A Diffuse Play.

Instead we see a lusty, intelligent, voluble man, easily capable of making speeches and fighting for reforms. He is supposed to have belayed his emotions until they are so near the surface that any time he is wrought up, no matter how intimate the cause, he rushes into a study, slams the door and makes fiction of the truth.

However true this habit may have been, on the stage he seems an impossibly exhibitionistic charlatan, whose best creative efforts ceased when he crossed the door sill.

His wife's declaration that the procedure reverses itself (he indulges in tears of despair after killing off one of his characters) only heightens this general impression.

This is a diffuse play covering the 34 years between Dickens' marriage to Catherine Hogarth and his death. It depicts the transition of a brilliant author, an international idol, to a farcical old man, obsessed with youth and surrounded by ashen sycophants.

Catherine comes through as the big character. A simple Scottish girl, whose care of her younger sisters has excluded any education, she is fresh and shy and entirely overwhelmed by the dizzy life of her famed husband.

Her Dismal Triumph.

Because she is constantly pregnant, and because her social instincts are elemental, it is easy for other people to usurp her rights as a wife and mother and as mistress of her home. The death of her youngest sister brings Georgina Hogarth into the Dickens domestic picture, and from there on Catherine is through.

Georgina is efficient about the master's writing, runs the house capably and brings up the many children, while the increasingly dazed Catherine grows more helpless.

In the end she is sent away to make room for a silly young actress who has caught the eye of the stage-struck author, while Georgina remains as an implacable executive.

Catherine's dismal triumph comes only at Dickens' death. Against his Puckish wish to be cremated unseen, his widow has his red beard and hair restored to their rightful white, and orders his body to lie in state in Westminster Abbey, in the dignity she would have wished for him.

The play is done in a beautiful sweeping interior and exhibits some lovely flowing Victorian gowns.

An ivy framed scrim lets each scene glow into life as Miss Evelyn reads chronological links of the story from off stage.

Her Finest Scenes.

She brings a piquant and homely quality to the principal role of Catherine and lends the play most of the slight humor it has. Her finest scenes are those in which she learns that she is no longer to live as Dickens' wife, and the final sequence, when with inexorable dignity she declares her rights as a widow.

After a flighty start, Carmen Mathews contributes a shrewd picture of coldly impassioned dedication as Georgina, and Daniel O'Herlihy is vibrant and virile as the Dickens whom he never lets become as ridiculous as he sometimes sounds.

Hurd Hatfield is a gruff and courtly Forster, whose chief ambition is to justify his bowdlerized biography of the writer, and both Ernest Cossart and Neva Patterson are agreeably welcome as Dickens' tippling father, and a devoted baroness.

No one can object to revealing authentic ugliness in a great figure, but the fact remains that the work that made him great is infinitely more interesting than the sordid sacrifices it cost to get the work on paper.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
APRIL 6, 1949

The Extremely Dull Life Of Mr. Charles Dickens

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

For all his greatness as a novelist, Charles Dickens was not a particularly interesting or attractive man, and his life was less than a dramatic one. It was hardly to be expected that a biographical drama about him would be exactly exciting. There was, however, no reason to anticipate that his life story would result in as tedious and woebegone a play as Mervyn Nelson's "The Ivy Green," which had its doleful premiere at the Lyceum Theatre last night.

The Dickens of Mr. Nelson's work is a vain, selfish, arrogant, peevish and generally objectionable fellow, which is quite possibly what the real Dickens was. The author's sin lay in making him also dull and fatuous and without any indication that he had even a minor talent. To make things worse, Mr. Nelson has surrounded the unhappy novelist with as uninteresting a group of friends, relatives, admirers and sweethearts as dramatic ineptness could well devise.

The Heroine

If the selfish and dull-witted Dickens can hardly be called the hero of "The Ivy Green," his loving and noble wife is certainly intended as the heroine. Yet my suspicion is that the poor lady is unintentionally revealed as just as trying and wearisome as her stuffy husband. Since Mrs. Dickens is not only a leading character in the play, but also an offstage voice commenting on the proceedings in a Scottish accent, my impression is that she does more than her share to handicap the evening.

"The Ivy Green" is an episodic play, which covers its victim's life from his arrival at Tavistock House in 1836, a successful young novelist with a happy bride, to his death in 1870, a silly, lost old man, pretending to be still young. What action there is consists chiefly of the struggle between his wistful, ever-loving spouse and her selfish sister for the great man's affections, and his final romance with the young actress named Ellen Ternan. There are also many scenes of argument with his faithful friend, John Forster.

Ironic Difference

If the playwright has any point to make, it seems to be the ironic difference between the novelist's literary greatness and sympathy for the poor and oppressed and his personal pettiness and selfishness toward those about him. Something might conceivably have come from the idea if it hadn't been so drowned in the unending dullness of its writing. There were times last night when "The Ivy Green" seemed one of the longest plays ever written. In addition, the relationship between the characters is often pretty obscure.

The one hero of the proceedings is Stewart Chaney, whose sets and costumes are attractive. In minor roles, Neva Patterson brings beauty and vitality to one of the vaguest parts ever written, and June Dayton adds a note of vivacity as Ellen Ternan. But Daniel O'Herlihy as Dickens, Judith Evelyn as Mrs. Dickens, Carmen Mathews as her disagreeable sister, Hurd Hatfield as John Forster, and the rest of them are hopelessly bogged down in the unfortunate meanderings of one of the season's bores.

Journal American
APRIL 6, 1949

Creeping and Dated Play About Dickens

By ROBERT GARLAND

Against a charming background provided by Stewart Chaney, in becoming costumes provided by the same, Judith Evelyn, one of the theatre's abler actresses, is Catherine Dickens to the Charles Dickens of Daniel O'Herlihy. In case, like me, you hadn't heard, Mr. O'Herlihy comes to New York from Dublin by way of Hollywood. There, he laid on lavishly as Macduff to the muddled Macbeth of Orson Welles.

At the Lyceum, in a Dickens biography assembled by Mervyn Nelson and called "The Ivy Green," the O'Herlihy and Miss Evelyn are supported, as it were, by Hurd Hatfield, Mr. Hatfield, the programs say, is also a refugee from the pictures-that-pretend-to-be-plays. His likeness, in Technicolor, is to be seen these mornings, afternoons and evenings on the Victoria's screen as a warrior-priest in "Joan of Arc."

These, along with such featured players as Carmen Mathews, Ernest Cossart and Neva Patterson, make mild and intermittent use of Mr. Chaney's background, especially the beautiful curving stairs, of Mr. Chaney's costumes, especially the ravishing maroon one worn by Miss Evelyn, and of Mr. Nelson's dialogue, which is bookish and generally uninspired. For two acts, eight scenes and three decades of Tavistock House Dickensenia, little of moment manages to transpire . . .

And when, occasionally, it does, it's more literary than dramatic, suggesting a protracted reading of Charles Dickens' life artistically illustrated by Stewart Chaney tableaux.

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Killed by Kindness

In working on "The Ivy Green"—"a dainty plant is the ivy green, it creepeth o'er ruins old" is from Charles Dickens' "The Pickwick Papers"—Mervyn Nelson gives the impression of being as bored with, and by, his nasty English novelist as I have always been. Now, in a play, it's all right to make the English novelist nasty. But it's all wrong to make the English novelist uninteresting.

Just what all the women of the Hogarth family see in him, you'll never learn from Mr. Nelson. Or from me. Yet, in fact as well as fiction at the Lyceum, one of the Hogarths marries him while two of her sisters carry on without benefit of clergy. Catherine, remember, is the one who gets the legal bans. But, in spite of 10 quite lawful offspring, Charles and Catherine never get together. Not really!

And that's the story of "The Ivy Green," the story the play, the playwright and the players are stuck with. And the playgoer at the Lyceum. Finally, having had his fill of Hogarths, the aging story-teller dyes his hair, touches up his beard, minimizes his limp and takes on as mistress an admiring young actress known as Ellen Ternan. It's she who, at long last, kills the end with kindness . . .

Or so I gather. At any rate, he dies downstage on a green chaise lounge which, if I hear correctly, George Sand is smart enough to send.

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Rises Above Play

As Catherine Dickens, wedded, but no wife, and with 10 children, Judith Evelyn manages to rise superior to her material. There're moments during the biography's episodical unfolding when she is, or seems to be, three dimensional and almost unbelievable. But there're other moments when she isn't. Frankly, I doubt if any actress could be. Or, for that matter, would even come out and try.

The men, I think, are pretty lifeless. Daniel O'Herlihy grows older and less Dickensonian all evening by the simple assumption of a beard, which is obviously phony, and a limp, which is obviously ditto. Hurd Hatfield still wanders up and down the Hollywoods as John Forster, Charles Dickens' agent and disappointed friend. Ernest Cossart is again Ernest Cossart as Charles Dickens' Dickensonian dad.

And, returning to the ladies, I almost forget to tell you that Carmen Mathews gives the evening's most sustained performance as Georgina Hogarth. In the fourth row of the orchestra you can always hear what she is saying, although you don't always feel the need to. And, admiring her as I do, that's more than can be said for Judith Evelyn as Catherine . . .

To misquote and cut short the program's titular quotation from "The Pickwick Papers," a dated play is "The Ivy Green," it creepeth.

Daily Mirror

APRIL 6, 1949

'The Ivy Green' Tedious Play About Dickens

By ROBERT COLEMAN

At the height of his fame, Charles Dickens visited America, was entertained royally and made a lot of money. Upon his return to England, he had some pretty nasty things to say about us. The score was evened in spades last evening by Mervyn Nelson's "The Ivy Green," which Hall Shelton brought to the Lyceum Theatre.

According to Nelson, Dickens was a fine one for laying down moral rules for others but not one to obey them himself. He loved humanity so much that he thought nothing of hurting individual members of it. Even his own wife and children. Even his staunchest friends.

Nelson portrays Dickens as an egotistical do-gooder, as a sucker for adulation, and as a fall guy for a pretty face. He let his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, alienate his friends and destroy his marriage. And then, in an attempt to recapture flaming youth with actress Ellen Ternan, he made a complete fool of himself and hastened his death. A death which enabled Mrs. Dickens to square accounts with her scheming, domineering sister.

Nelson seldom is able to bring his characters to life. For most of the evening they seem to be cardboard caricatures. At times they are even downright silly. There are occasional flashes of effective drama, but they are insufficient to make the evening other than tedious.

Producer Shelton has assembled an excellent cast for the play, including Judith Evelyn, Hurd Hatfield, Carmen Mathews, Daniel O'Herlihy, Ernest Cossart, Neva Patterson, Oliver Cliff and Joy Reese. But these skilled performers are unable to draw sparks from a static script.

Stewart Chaney has designed a charming replica of Tavistock House, the home presented the novelist by an admirer, Baroness Angela Burdette-Coutts. Though Roy Hargrave had an assist from Richard Barr in staging the biographical drama, the result lacks distinction.

As is so often the case, a great artist has defied the efforts of a biographer to make him seem worthy of his works. It is difficult to believe that the central figure of "The Ivy Green" ever gave us immortal novels. Wagner also has proved a terror for dramatists. Personally, we would prefer to sit at home and read "David Copperfield" or "Pickwick Papers" in comfort to wrestle with "The Ivy Green" at the Lyceum.

Winchell says: "The Dickens with it!"

The Sun

APRIL 6, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Everything but a Play.

"The Ivy Green," Mervyn Nelson's biographical treatment of the life of Charles Dickens, covering more than three decades, is one of the most tiresome plays of the season. It was put on last evening at the Lyceum by Hall Shelton.

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Stewart Chaney has provided a stunning period setting, that of the drawing room at Tavistock House, with its grand winding stairway. There are some elaborate costumes, appropriate props, and players upon the stage who work hard enough. But with what? There is only hollow and tedious writing in the scenes that have been assigned to them. "The Ivy Green" is undramatic and pretentious from beginning to end.

The episodes of the Nelson play have to do with the life of Dickens from the time of his marriage in 1836 until his death in 1870. They present him as a rakish and predatory Victorian and show his relationship with his mistreated wife, Catherine, who bears him ten children; her sisters, Mary and Georgina Hogarth; Maria Beadnell, of whom he wrote in "David Copperfield," and the youthful Ellen Ternan, with whom he fell in love.

The cast members of "The Ivy Green" are defeated at the outset. The author didn't make people of his characters. Charles Dickens emerges, in the writing, and in the playing of Daniel O'Herlihy, as a pompous and blustery figure and one of the dullest men of his time. Judith Evelyn has some success with her characterization as the patient, devoted and long-suffering Catherine, who is banished, when the great man meets a new and young love.

Hurd Hatfield is fairly lost in the meaningless role of Dickens's publisher and friend; so is that able actor, Ernest Cossart, as the father. Carmen Mathews plays the conniving spinster, who takes over as housekeeper at Tavistock. The striking Neva Patterson brings graciousness to the scanty part of the Baroness, and gives the impression that she would be an ideal Elizabeth Barrett. June Dayton comes along late in the play as the young Ellen, and puts some spirit into her scenes.

The play is not helped along by the vexatious device of a Narrator, with the voice of Catherine coming through the loudspeaker.

"The Ivy Green," which takes its title from a line in "Pickwick Papers," is a plodding and lifeless drama. Dickensians definitely, won't like it. There is everything upon the stage of the Lyceum but a play.